Pakistan seek ODI series win as SA eye comeback

FAISALABAD: Buoyed by their victory in the series opener here at the Iqbal Stadium, a confident Pakistan side will look to seal the three-match series when they face South Africa in the second One-day International at the same venue on Thursday.Chasing 264, Pakistan won a tense first ODI by two wickets on Tuesday with only a couple of balls to spare on a pitch that assisted spinners in the later stages of both the innings. Having elected to field first, the Shaheen Shah Afridi-captained hosts were facing a tough situation when Matthew Breetzke's South Africa reached 98-0 as their openers dominated the proceedings. Later, the tourists were 191-3 in 33 overs before they suffered a late collapse as the home spinners took charge.

The pitch is likely to favour batsmen early on though spinners could again play a key role in the later stages of the match at the traditionally dry surface.

For South Africa, the focus will be on adapting quickly to the conditions and countering Pakistan's bowling which has depth as well as variety.

The touring batsmen, in particular, will be looking to build partnerships and produce a better show with greater discipline against the likes of Shaheen, Naseem Shah, Abrar Ahmed, Mohammad Nawaz and part-time spinner Saim Ayub, who earned the player-of-the-match award for his all-round show -- 2-39 in eight overs and 39 runs -- in the first game.

The South African players attended a training session at the Iqbal Stadium on Wednesday while the Pakistan team opted to rest.

The tourists participated in warm-up exercises followed by batting, bowling and fielding practice drills.

'CREDIT TO BATTERS'

Earlier, talking at the post-match ceremony, Shaheen lauded the batters for their match-winning show in the series opener.

Match starts at 3:00pm (PST)

"Our bowlers came back in the last 10 overs to restrict South Africa to a reasonable total. But I will give credit to our batters who played well on a wicket that had both turn and swing [in the latter stages of the innings]," Shaheen said.

"They handled the situation well."

Replying to a question regarding the tense victory in the series opener, the Pakistan skipper said, "That always happens in cricket but we'll try to make it not happen again."

Speaking at a news conference after the first ODI, Pakistan wicket-keeper/batter Mohammad Rizwan defended the hosts' decision to bowl first.

"The decision to bowl first was taken by us while keeping in view the prevailing situation [at the ground]. It was a combined decision by us," Rizwan told reporters while answering a question.

"Plus there was the dew factor. All of us had the same opinion that we should bowl first keeping in mind that dew will come into play in the latter stages of the day. The batting looked easy early on in the first innings but then came the dew factor."

Responding to a question, Rizwan said that the hosts should have wrapped up the match earlier as Pakistan were well set at 196-3 in the 39th over with Rizwan (55) and Salman Ali Agha (62) at the crease.

"Yes, we [Salman and Rizwan] should have finished the game. Actually, the wicket was behaving awkwardly where the ball was skidding, gripping and bouncing and we were set.

"We will try not to repeat the mistakes and finish the game in future."

Regarding the historic international match that the Iqbal Stadium hosted after 17 years, Rizwan said, "On our part, wherever we play at home — including Lahore, Peshawar, Quetta, Rawalpindi or Faisalabad — we get the same support from the crowd.

"It is what message the other [visiting] teams get from our crowds matters the most."

Talking to reporters after the first match, South African pacer Corbin Bosch said that the wicket was good for spinners.

"It was a new ball wicket, and was tough [to bat on]. The ball [particularly in the latter stages] turned and spinners played a crucial role for both the teams," Bosch told reporters.

The pacer believed that South Africa were slightly short of setting Pakistan a winning target, saying, "We were perhaps 15 runs short on this wicket".—Agencies

WEST INDIES batter Roston Chase plays a shot as New Zealand wicket-keeper Devon Conway looks on during the first T20 International at Eden Park on Wednesday.—AFP

West Indies edge NZ in first T20 despite Santner's brilliance

AUCKLAND: A brilliant bowling performance secured the West Indies an unlikely seven-run victory in the first T20 International against New Zealand on Wednesday, despite a stunning solo effort from Mitchell Santner.

The West Indies, who landed in New Zealand only two days ago, struggled on the Eden Park drop-in wicket that offered some seam and turn to the home bowlers, making 164-6 from their 20 overs.

The visitors then delivered a precise bowling performance to restrict the Black Caps, who needed a brilliant 28-ball 55 from captain Santner to keep the game interesting.

Santner won the toss and elected to field at an initially sun-filled Eden Park.

The Black Caps struck twice in the powerplay, Brandon King and Alick Athanaze falling to Jacob Duffy and Kyle Jamieson respectively to leave West Indies 32-2 after six overs.

Captain Shai Hope looked to anchor the innings for the visitors, cautiously approaching his opening overs before ramping up the risk as he attacked the straight boundaries.

The West Indies were 66-3 halfway through their innings, but then plundered 34 runs in the next three overs as Hope brought up a 38-ball 50.

He fell from the very next ball, a Zak Foulkes delivery staying low and wiping out the leg stump as Hope tried to hoist it over the leg side.

Rovman Powell provided much-needed power for the West Indies, clubbing two sixes as he brought up a 23-ball 33, but his side meandered towards what appeared an under-par score.

But then it was all West Indies.

Tim Robinson opened the batting for New Zealand alongside Devon Conway, who returned to the XI after Tim Seifert broke a finger while batting in domestic cricket on Sunday.

Seamer Matthew Forde was superb for West Indies, taking 1-9 from three powerplay overs.

New Zealand struggled to find the boundary and a double strike by Jayden Seales in the 13th over flipped the game in the visitors' favour, removing Daryl Mitchell and Michael Bracewell in the space of three balls.

Seales finished with 3-32 from his four overs.

A late flurry from Santner gave New Zealand faint hope but, needing 20 from the final over, he fell just short.

The two sides play again at Eden Park on Thursday in the second game of the five-match series.—AFP

Scoreboard

WEST INDIES:	R. Ravindra c Holder b Hosein 21
B. King c Foulkes b Duffy 3	M. Chapman c Forde b Chase 7
A. Athanaze c Chapman b Jamieson ...16	D. Mitchell c Forde b Seales 13
S. Hope b Foulkes 53	M. Bracewell c Hope b Seales 1
A. Auguste c Ravindra b Neesham 2	J. Neesham c Forde b Chase 11
R. Chase b Duffy 28	M. Santner not out 55
R. Powell c Conway b Foulkes 33	Z. Foulkes c&b Chase 1
J. Holder not out 5	K. Jamieson c Holder b Seales 2
R. Shepherd not out 9	J. Duffy not out 1
EXTRAS (LB-6, W-9) 15	**EXTRAS** (LB-2, W-3) 5
TOTAL (for six wickets, 20 overs) 164	**TOTAL** (for nine wickets, 20 overs) 157
DID NOT BAT: M. Forde, A. Hosein, J. Seales	**FALL OF WICKETS:** 1-30 (Conway), 2-48 (Robinson), 3-70 (Chapman), 4-83 (Ravindra), 5-87 (Mitchell), 6-88 (Bracewell), 7-100 (Neesham), 8-102 (Foulkes), 9-107 (Jamieson)
FALL OF WICKETS: 1-4 (King), 2-28 (Athanaze), 3-43 (Auguste), 4-97 (Hope), 5-146 (Chase), 6-148 (Powell)	**BOWLING:** Seales 4-0-32-3, Forde 4-0-32-1 (1w), Holder 4-0-35-0 (1w), Shepherd 3-0-26-1, Chase 4-0-26-3 (1w), Hosein 1-0-4-1
BOWLING: Duffy 4-0-19-2 (3w), Jamieson 4-0-30-1 (2w), Foulkes 4-0-35-2 (1w), Neesham 3-0-23-1 (1w), Santner 4-0-40-0 (2w), Ravindra 1-0-11-0	**RESULT:** West Indies won by seven runs.
NEW ZEALAND:	**PLAYER-OF-THE-MATCH:** Roston Chase
T. Robinson c Athanaze b Shepherd ... 27	
D. Conway b Forde 13	

Pant returns to Indian squad for SA Tests

NEW DELHI: Rishabh Pant will make his return to India's squad for the two-Test series against South Africa, the country's cricket board announced on Wednesday, marking his comeback from a foot fracture that sidelined him from the series against West Indies.

Pant missed the 2-0 series drubbing of West Indies last month after fracturing his foot during a Test match against England in September, with Dhruv Jurel stepping in to keep wickets.

Left-handed batter Pant proved his match fitness in style last week in a game between India 'A' and South Africa 'A' in Bengaluru, where the 28-year-old scored 90 in the second innings to guide his team to a three-wicket victory.

Fast bowler Akash Deep also returns to the squad after missing the West Indies series.

Several players such as skipper Shubman Gill and pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah will join the team after the ongoing T20 International series in Australia.

The first Test of the series against South Africa begins on November 14 in Kolkata before they move to Guwahati for the second Test from November 22.

South Africa have skipper Temba Bavuma back in the squad after a calf injury kept him out of the drawn series (1-1) in Pakistan last month.

Currently, India are third in the World Test Championship while reigning champions South Africa are fourth.

Squad: Shubman Gill (captain), Rishabh Pant (wicket-keeper, vice-captain), Yashasvi Jaiswal, KL Rahul, Sai Sudharsan, Devdutt Padikkal, Dhruv Jurel, Ravindra Jadeja, Washington Sundar, Jasprit Bumrah, Axar Patel, Nitish Kumar Reddy, Mohammed Siraj, Kuldeep Yadav, Akash Deep.—Reuters

ISLAMABAD: Asian Football Confederation president Sheikh Salman bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa gestures during the interview on Wednesday.—Tanveer Shahzad/White Star

AFC president looking towards promising days for football in Pakistan

Sheikh Salman stresses support from FIFA and AFC, expresses confidence that government will play its part in game's development

By Umaid Wasim

INTERVIEW

THIS time, on this visit, the promise of what the future beholds has provided long-awaited relief to the Asian Football Confederation president. Having met with government leaders throughout the morning and the afternoon on Wednesday, Sheikh Salman bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa, also the senior vice-president of FIFA, sounded thrilled at the prospect of football moving forward in Pakistan after a decade of crisis and controversy.

Asia's football chief is on a three-day visit to the country where he has been invited as a State Guest and having arrived on Tuesday night, he met deputy prime minister Ishaq Dar, acting president Yousuf Raza Gilani and interior minister Mohsin Naqvi to kick off his tour with talks centering on how Pakistan can make up for lost time. Other items on the agenda were the assurance of stability in the Pakistan Football Federation and the resumption of the domestic league.

After a busy day of talks, and when he sat down in the evening for an interview with *Dawn* in the boardroom of a plush hotel in Islamabad, Sheikh Salman said he felt "confident" that the government was willing to invest in the game and that the "only way forward was up".

"If you look at the last eight years, since I was last here in Pakistan, a lot has changed but let's not forget that there was a [FIFA-appointed] Normalisation Committee [for the PFF] for seven years [since 2019] and the PFF was suspended three times… it wasn't a good sign," he reflected on the crisis that had engulfed the federation since 2015 and ended with the election of Mohsen Gilani as the country's football chief earlier this year.

"All we wanted was the constitution and the statutes [of the PFF] according to FIFA and the AFC and it took so much time just to do that. Finally, though, it was done and we had an election with the statutes approved and a new board in place.

"We're looking forward to working together. What matters is the future. We've wasted so much time in the past but we must look today at what can be done and how we can support the growth of football in Pakistan through FIFA's programmes and the AFC. This country has so much potential and I'm sure that the only way forward is going up."

The AFC chief, who has known Mohsen "for a long time", feels he is the right man to take Pakistan football forward.

"When Mohsen was elected, I was happy because he is a football person," added Sheikh Salman. "He has a vision, a FIFA Masters degree which not a lot of member association presidents have. It's good we have someone who has a football background but we need to give him the support and give him the chance to show and then judge. We need to judge him after a period of time to see what he can do.

"I think it is a challenge for him but it is a challenge for us as well. I don't think he can do it on his own or I can do it on my own. It means the unity of everyone to achieve what we hope for. We want to be close to the PFF because the president has a plan. Whether it is through the private sector or the government or FIFA, we need to be side by side. But we need to support him to have a stable organisation running football in Pakistan."

Sheikh Salman, however, insisted that there will be no compromise on accountability.

"We need to learn from the past, we don't need to make the same mistakes," he said, hinting at the previous regime. "Mohsen is in for a full term and I've told him that I'll support you but you will be accountable as well. I want to see positives."

Since taking over as president, Mohsen's body has been plagued by funding issues — most notably the control over bank accounts and an audit of the term of the Normalisation Committee. Sheikh Salman insisted that financial support will come in due course.

"The AFC and the FIFA support is going to come if you prepare everything in the right way because the global and continental organisations want to know that the funds are used in the proper way," he said. "We have set certain regulations that all 211 members of FIFA have to follow and if the rules are followed, the support will come."

SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

The AFC chief emphasised that the responsibility of developing the sport shouldn't lie solely with the federation, or FIFA and the AFC.

He looked forward to the government playing its due part but without compromising the independence of the PFF. National sports federations, including the PFF, have for years cried foul over interference into their matters but Sheikh Salman expressed his pleasure that, for now, the government and the PFF are on the same page.

"The rules are clear in dividing responsibilities and we all know about the role of the government, which is an important one, what the role of the federation is and what our role is as well," he said. "We cannot interfere more as we should as well … we have our limits. But we have to support the independence of the federation as well, and how we can support them, whether it is us or the government.

"We shouldn't rule out the role of the government. We don't have that problem in other countries … we have it in certain countries. But we are there to make sure they don't happen. I feel the Pakistan government is serious in investing in the game and I know there are certain capabilities I cannot ask for but it's a responsibility we all share and we need to work on.

"In football there is not always enough no matter what you do. No matter how much you pour in, it's still not enough. But we've seen a lot of results in certain countries where resources are limited but the results are great and this defines success.

"I'm not asking Pakistan to win the Asian Cup today but I'm asking how we can attract people to play because football has a social responsibility not just about competitiveness but we want to introduce it to schools, to neighbourhoods. And I know there are a lot of kids around who want to play."

There, however, is also the need for competition and the resumption of domestic competitions. The Pakistan Premier Football League has not been held since 2019 and while the debate rages on whether the new competition is franchise-based or club-based, Sheikh Salman says it should be a model "that works best for the country".

"It's a local decision, the people of PFF would know exactly which system suits them, whether it is franchise or other way around," he said. "We are ready to advise on the pros and cons but it depends on having the right partner to support you."

He, however, cautioned into buying into the idea of a franchise league too quickly.

"It should be a proper professional league and not one that runs for three months," he said. "It has to be a good balance between the football aspect and the commercial side. We want to keep it hand in hand, not one taking over the other. If there is a vision and the government also wants it, it will happen. But let's take it step by step. We don't want to aim so high but to start the league is the first step."

Note: This is the first part of a wide-ranging interview with the AFC president. The second part will be published in Friday's edition.

Australia pick uncapped Weatherald for first Ashes Test

SYDNEY: Chief selector George Bailey hailed "impressive" uncapped opener Jake Weatherald as having all the right attributes after he was named on Wednesday in Australia's squad for the first Ashes Test.

In-form batsman Marnus Labuschagne was recalled but young opener Sam Konstas was dropped from the 15-man squad, which will be captained by Steve Smith in the injury-enforced absence of Pat Cummins.

Should the 31-year-old Weatherald pad up against Ben Stokes's England, he will be the sixth opening partner for Usman Khawaja since David Warner retired last year.

Previous experiments with Smith, Nathan McSweeney, Travis Head, Labuschagne and Konstas did not pan out.

Bailey would not say if Weatherald would definitely make his debut in Perth on Nov 21.

"No, not confirmed in the XI," Bailey said. "Obviously we've got 14 of our 15-man squad playing round four [Sheffield Shield].

"Still some information to gather out of that. Cameron Green being one, returning to the bowling crease, that'd be good."

All-rounder Green has been playing only as a batsman since his return mid-year following back surgery 13 months ago.

He has bowled just a handful of overs this season.

Should he be able to demonstrate he can handle sufficient workload to support the pace attack, Green will likely drop to bat at six with Weatherald opening.

In that scenario Labuschagne, who is back after being dropped for the previous Test series against the West Indies, would come in at his preferred number three having blasted five centuries in eight innings this season.

If Green is still struggling, then Labuschagne would potentially open alongside Khawaja with Green at three and Beau Webster retaining his spot at six.

The left-hander Weatherald has been a top-performing opener in domestic ranks over the past few years.

He put himself on the Ashes radar by clobbering 183 for Australia A during a red-ball series against Sri Lanka A in Darwin this year, with his form continuing in the Sheffield Shield for Tasmania.

"I think if you look at his performance over 18 to 24 months it's been really solid," Bailey said. "He scores at a good rate. The way he goes about building his innings, it's been impressive."

Weatherald's inclusion meant disappointment for Matt Renshaw, who had been tipped to get the nod as Konstas has struggled for form.

Smith takes charge because Cummins, who will travel with the squad to Perth, has not played since picking up a lower back injury against the West Indies more than three months ago.

The day-night second Test in Brisbane from Dec 4 is a tentative target for Cummins to return.

The ever-reliable Scott Boland will replace Cummins in the seam attack alongside quick bowlers Mitchell Starc and Josh Hazlewood.

Nathan Lyon provides the spin option in his 140th Test, where he can surpass Glenn McGrath to become the sixth-highest wicket-taker in history by claiming two more victims.

Uncapped Brendan Doggett and Sean Abbott were included as the back-up fast bowlers and Josh Inglis will provide cover for wicket-keeper Alex Carey.

- Ageing side - Australia are an ageing side, with former skipper Steve Waugh saying: "The bowlers are in their 30s and some of the batsmen are getting on as well."

Bailey said in response: "I'm interested as to when people have that view, would they like us to leave Nathan Lyon and Mitchell Starc out, is it just because of their age?.

"I think you have to have respect that these guys work incredibly hard to play Test cricket."

Following Perth, the five-Test series moves to Brisbane, Adelaide, Melbourne and Sydney.

England drew 2-2 on home turf in the most recent Ashes series in 2023, but have not won in Australia since 2010-11.

Squad: Steve Smith (captain), Sean Abbott, Scott Boland, Alex Carey, Brendan Doggett, Cameron Green, Josh Hazlewood, Travis Head, Josh Inglis, Usman Khawaja, Marnus Labuschagne, Nathan Lyon, Mitchell Starc, Jake Weatherald, Beau Webster.—AFP